

Notes for Military and Veteran's Committee 09/18/13

- Thank You Chairman Stamas and the Committee members of the Military and Veterans Affairs Committee for the opportunity to speak today. In addition I would like to thank Chairman Stamas, and Representative Knezek along with the numerous co-sponsors of House Joint Resolution N and House Joint Resolution M
- My name is Rick Donovan and I am a member of the American Legion Department of Michigan here today in support of both HJR N and HJR M.
- Over the next five years, analysts estimate 10,000 to 15,000 veterans will move back to Michigan annually as a result of troop withdrawals from Afghanistan and of force restructuring that will downsize the military's active duty component. Many of these veterans and their dependents will take advantage of the Post-911 GI Bill. Additionally, many of our state's unemployed veterans are currently enrolled in job training and technical schools pursuing careers in Michigan's high demand occupations.
- I come before you today to provide information to the committee concerning HJR M and HJR N. I would like to reference the packets provided for each bill so the committee has the necessary information to discuss and vote on these two important and needed bills.
- I would also like to thank the Consortium of Michigan Veteran Educators (CMVE). In testimony to this committee on March 14, 2013 the consortium stated that their primary goal was to increase the number of service members and their families who take advantage of the educational benefits that are available to them such as the Post-911 G.I. Bill. As part of this critical goal, the members of the consortium were also focused on ensuring that Veterans who enroll in Michigan's public post-secondary institutions

receive the support they need to successfully complete a credential that will lead to gainful employment and productive lives.

- HJRN is a Bill that will help the 28 Community Colleges accomplish this goal by attracting Veterans to the community and junior colleges of our great state with the stated goal of assisting our unemployed Veterans with the education, training and credentials needed to obtain meaningful employment.
- In 2011 the President signed into law the VOW to Hire Heroes Act. Included in this new law is the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), a program that offers up to 12 months of training assistance to unemployed Veterans who otherwise do not have military education benefits. The Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) and the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) have been partnering on this program since July of 2012. A fact sheet has been provided in your packet concerning the eligibility requirements of this amazing education benefit.
- Unique to this program, and why HJR M is so important to the community colleges of Michigan, is that in order to qualify for VRAP a Veteran needs be unemployed and willing to receive training in a high demand occupation. And that training must come from a VA approved program at a community college or training facility. As of August 29th, 2013, 3,861 Veterans in Michigan have been approved for benefits. Referring to the VRAP Application maps and VRAP training maps you can see that 1,824 Veterans in Michigan are approved for benefits, yet for some reason have not enrolled in their training program leaving on the table a potential of over \$34,232,832 which should be getting used at community colleges and technical schools in our state.

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In the back of the packet provided, the committee will notice a map of the community college districts, as well as a map of the Veteran population by county in Michigan.

I urge the committee to vote on HJR M offering In-district tuition for all Veterans across our state and to help the 28 community colleges accomplish their stated goal to increase the number of service members and veterans taking advantage of the education benefits available to them not only under VRAP but also the other various education benefits that has been earned by our Hometown Heroes for their bravery and sacrifices.

In support of HJR N the American Legion, Department of Michigan would like to thank the 18 states across the nation who have laws allowing veterans to qualify for In-State tuition. Recently, our neighboring states of Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota and as recently as May, 2013 Indiana who now all have laws pertaining to In-State tuition for our nation's Veterans.

HJR N brings Michigan in line with these other states and allows Michigan to competitively attract the talent of our nation's Veterans back home.. Home to Pure Michigan.

We appreciate the recent announcement of the University of Michigan stating the Board of Regents will allow veterans to qualify for in-state tuition rates at the university regardless of home or county of residency.

In a press release dated July, 19th, 2013 Michael Dakduk, executive Director of the Student Veterans of American, applauded the recent announcement, and included that "I(he)encouraged

the state of Michigan to follow the example of the University of Michigan by approving in-state tuition for veterans statewide".

It is important to note that not all veterans get the Post-9/11 GI Bill, or any of the other forms of the GI Bill's currently in use. For example some veterans enlisted during the Veteran's Education Assistance Program or the Montgomery GI Bill. In order to qualify at the 100% rate of the Post-9/11 GI Bill the veteran has to serve on active duty for a total of 36 months.

Often times our National Guard and Reserve members who have been called to serve in Iraq or Afghanistan don't meet the 36 month eligibility requirement to get 100% of the Post 9/11 benefits and qualify for the Yellow Ribbon Program. A Veterans Administration(VA) fact sheet has been provided in the packet given to the committee.

In addition HJR N will help support not only these Veterans in Michigan, but veterans eligible for the other forms of the GI Bill to include our nations veterans in other states who want to attend any of Michigan's Community Colleges and Universities via online training and degree programs.

In close, I again would like to thank Chairman Stamas, Representative Knezek with their introductions to each of these pieces of legislation and their attempt to helping the Veterans of Michigan.

Each bill will help the Consortium of Michigan Veteran Educators consisting of all 28 public Community Colleges, and 15 Public universities to accomplish their stated goal to this committee of increasing the number of service members, and

their families, who take advantage of the educational benefits that are available to them such as the GI Bill.

As part of this critical goal the members of this committee have an opportunity to now support our Veterans to enroll, and complete a credential that will lead to gainful employment opportunities, and productive lives.

Our state, with both these bills in place will allow Michigan to be more competitive as a destination for top-quality talent.

Talent that has already demonstrated the ability to lead, adapt, and problem solve in some of the most extreme circumstances on the planet.

Veterans bring with them job-ready skills, proven leadership, a strong work ethic and a fierce sense of loyalty. Unafraid of new challenges, these men and woman have demonstrated that they can work in diverse and unpredictable environments, cooperate as team players and shift gears at a moment's notice. These skills and traits are exactly what Michigan needs to succeed in tomorrow's economy.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony concerning these important pieces of legislation affecting the Veterans not only of Michigan, but our nation as well.

I welcome any questions offered by the Chair or the committee.

Thank You.